

Federal Lawmakers Renewed Their Call Just Weeks Ago In Support Of Establishing A Pilot Program

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand and U.S. Representative Richard Hanna today applauded the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) commitment to initiate a pilot program to increase the availability of Greek yogurt in school meal programs.

In their January 17, 2013 letter to the USDA, Senator Gillibrand and Rep. Hanna urged the Secretary of Agriculture to establish a pilot program and to update the MyPlate nutrition guides to reflect the health benefits of Greek yogurt. They asserted that Greek yogurt should be permitted as an affordable, high protein option under the National School Lunch Program, which is responsible for feeding 31 million students daily.

This week, USDA announced it is commencing a pilot program to purchase large quantities of Greek yogurt and offer it directly to schools through the USDA Foods program. The trial period announced this week will help USDA establish the demand for Greek yogurt in school lunch programs.

With a burgeoning Greek yogurt industry in New York, this initiative would have a positive impact on the state's growing yogurt industry as well as New York's dairy farmers who supply local milk for the process. Over 90 percent of milk used to make yogurt at Chobani's plant in Chenango County is produced by dairy farmers in New York.

"This is clearly the right decision, and I am pleased the USDA is coming through," **said Senator Gillibrand**, a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee. "New York State is home to a strong and growing Greek yogurt industry that we absolutely should be connecting to our schools. Today, we are one step closer to giving our children better access to a healthy source of protein, while strengthening New York's dairy industry."

"I applaud USDA for quickly agreeing to move forward with a pilot program for Greek yogurt to reach many more schools throughout the nation," **Rep. Hanna said**. "New York State is an

ideal location to test the benefits of providing Greek yogurt directly to schools through the USDA Foods program as a protein-packed food choice."

"Greek yogurt is a healthy, delicious and local food that consumers are purchasing throughout the United States – so it makes sense to let school districts and students enjoy the nutrition and cost-savings as well," **Rep. Hanna added.** "Greek yogurt is a true growth industry and success story here in Central New York. This USDA program is a win not only for students and schools – but also for great Upstate businesses like Chobani and our hardworking dairy farmers."